



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT AND DCASE ANNOUNCE FOUR NEW MEMBERS TO SERVE ON THE CULTURAL ADVISORY COUNCIL**

**CHICAGO**—City Council today approved the appointments of four new members of the local arts community to serve on the Cultural Advisory Council of the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE): Blake-Anthony Johnson of the Chicago Sinfonietta; artist Edra Soto; Kaoru Watanabe of the National Cambodian Heritage Museum and Killing Fields Memorial; and Debra Yepa-Pappan of the Field Museum.

“A robust Chicago arts and culture community inspires us, engages us, questions the status quo and has the power to bring our diverse city together in conversation around the critical challenges of our day,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “I am grateful to bring these four new voices to the table, who will work with us to ensure that Chicago remains a vibrant and innovative cultural hub and all of our residents have equitable access to the arts.”

The appointees are a diverse group of Chicagoans from across the city representing a broad cross-section of arts genres. They include practicing artists, representatives from major cultural institutions and neighborhood organizations, and the community at large.

**Blake-Anthony Johnson — Chief Executive Officer, Chicago Sinfonietta**



The first African American executive to guide a nationally renowned orchestra, Blake-Anthony Johnson is Chief Executive Officer of the award-winning Chicago Sinfonietta. A civically engaged and transformational leader, he focuses on community-centric, multi-disciplinary, and educational initiatives that enable cultural institutions to provide equitable access and public service to all. An active member of numerous organizational boards and committees, including The Sir Georg Solti Foundation U.S., the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (in various roles), the Steering Committee of Chicago Musical Pathways Initiative, and the League of American Orchestras' EDI Orchestra Management

Committee, Johnson is also an accomplished musician, and is a former professional cellist and protégé of Michael Tilson Thomas at New World Symphony. A champion of arts



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education, Johnson is a member of the Faculty at Roosevelt University's Chicago Conservatory of Performing Arts. His former posts include two terms on the National Endowment for the Arts Music Panel; Assistant Personnel Manager, Spoleto Music Festival USA; Director of Learning and Community, Louisville Orchestra; and as an Arts Advisory Council Member in Louisville, K.Y.

### **Edra Soto — Artist**



Edra Soto is a Puerto-Rican born artist, curator, educator, and co-director of the outdoor project space, The Franklin. Soto has exhibited extensively at venues including El Museo del Barrio, N.Y.; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art's satellite, The Momentary, A.K.; Albright-Knox Northland, N.Y.; Museum of Contemporary Art of Chicago, I.L.; Smart Museum, I.L., and the Abrons Arts Center, N.Y. Recently, Soto completed a large-scale public art commission titled "Screenhouse" currently on view at Millennium Park in Chicago. The artist has attended residency programs at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Beta-Local, the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Residency, Headlands Center for the Arts, Project Row Houses, and Art Omi, among others. Soto has been awarded the Efroymsen Contemporary Arts Fellowship, the Illinois Arts Council Agency Fellowship, the inaugural Foundwork Artist Prize, and the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant, among others. Between 2019-2020, Soto exhibited and traveled to Brazil, Puerto Rico, and Cuba as part of the MacArthur Foundation's International Connections Fund. Soto holds an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a bachelor's degree from Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Diseño de Puerto Rico. The artist lives and works in Chicago.

### **Kaoru Watanabe — Associate Director, National Cambodian Heritage Museum and Killing Fields Memorial**



Kaoru Watanabe is currently the Associate Director of the National Cambodian Heritage Museum and Killing Fields Memorial, and the Cambodian Association of Illinois. She is a nurse by training, who brings holistic and ecological approaches to the work with the community. Throughout her professional career, she has been interested in working with and facilitating dialogues among people and communities that bring different lived experiences and perspectives. She was born and raised in Tokyo, Japan; and worked in Cairo, Egypt before moving to Chicago. She has a BS in nursing from St. Luke's College of Nursing (Japan) and an MS in nursing science from the University of Illinois at Chicago.



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**Debra Yepa-Pappan — Native Community Engagement Coordinator, Field Museum**



Debra Yepa-Pappan, who is Korean and a tribally enrolled member of the Pueblo of Jemez, is the Community Engagement Coordinator for the Native American Exhibit Hall renovation project. She welcomes Native American visitors to the Field Museum and engages them in dialogue about the exhibits in the Hall and the upcoming renovation. As an active member of the Chicago Native American community, she also serves as a liaison between the Museum and the community. She is an artist with international acclaim in the field of contemporary Native American art, and through her artwork and her work at the Museum she is committed to changing inaccurate representations of Native people, and advocates for the inclusion of Native first voice and perspectives. Debra is married to artist Chris Pappan whose work is on display in the exhibition “Drawing on Tradition: Kanza Artist Chris Pappan.”

Today, City Council also approved the reappointments of several current members of the Cultural Advisory Council, who will serve additional two-year terms: Juan Díes, Bob Faust, Robert Gomez, Esther Grisham Grimm, Tracie D. Hall, Akilah S. Halley, Kevin Iega Jeff, Tonika Lewis Johnson, Bill Michel, Coya Paz, Myrna Salazar, and Vivian Teng.

Chair Amina J. Dickerson and Vice Chair Alison Cuddy lead the 29-member Cultural Advisory Council, which meets quarterly to advise DCASE on matters relating to the city’s cultural affairs and special events — and supports the Commissioner’s efforts to expand the reach and impact of the city’s rich and varied arts, cultural, and entertainment resources.

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**Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events**

The Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) is dedicated to enriching Chicago’s artistic vitality and cultural vibrancy. This includes fostering the development of Chicago’s non-profit arts sector, independent working artists and for-profit arts businesses; providing a framework to guide the City’s future cultural and economic growth, via the Chicago Cultural Plan; marketing the City’s cultural assets to a worldwide audience; and presenting high-quality, free and affordable cultural programs for residents and visitors. Visit [chicago.gov/dcase](http://chicago.gov/dcase).